21st Century Learning

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After reading the article, “How to Bring Our Schools Out of the 20th Century,” I sadly agreed that our schools have not changed as rapidly as other fields. Our students in the 21st Century have a technological background that surpasses most of their teachers. Each day, they have at their fingertips iPads, Flip cams, smart phones, and more. In order to keep up with our students, it is necessary for our schools to make the shift that is called for in the article. Some schools are starting to make that shift. Unfortunately, most schools have not though. Most of the time, the devices that our students use all day long are left outside our classrooms for fear of the distractions they may cause. However, it is a fact that students are intrigued by these items and would thrive in the classroom if they were given the opportunity to utilize them to show what they learn. I was intrigued by the statement in the video, “Learning to Change, Changing to Learn.” They said, “Every turned off device is potentially a turned off child.” Since technology is not going away, it is the responsibility of educators to make a shift. They need to embrace this technology to help their students stay engaged as well as teach them how to use it appropriately.

**What does 21st Century Learning Look Like?**

Many schools are intimidated by making the necessary shift. However, are we preparing our students for their future professions (which may have not even been created yet), if we don’t make a shift. Students learn how to utilize their technological tools on their own at home, most of the time quicker than the adults around them. However, it is not just necessary for our students to use these tools, it is necessary for them to learn how to use them appropriately. Our schools need to take on teaching our students about information literacy. Then, they can use technology to their benefit with the Web 2.0 tools that are out there, and the possibilities would be endless.

Terry Egan, a developer from the Educational Testing Service, said the following about our students’ information literacy, “We kind of assumed this generation was so comfortable with technology that they know how to use it for research and deeper thinking. But if they’re not taught these skills, they don’t necessarily pick them up.” Our students have so many tools at their fingertips, but just like we needed to learn how to identify reliable sources for research, so do our students. A 21st Century classroom cannot just expect our students to research a given topic using the Internet. It is necessary for our students to be able to identify credible sources on the Internet as well. If our students complete their research papers using online tools, those tools need to be reliable ones. However, in order for them to learn that, they need to be educated properly.

Like the article said, there are programs out there that can help us start to make the shift in our classrooms. Many of these programs are known as Web 2.0 Tools. These Web 2.0 tools are intriguing to our students and they often can be tailored to fit each student’s individual needs. One such program is [Khan Academy](http://www.khanacademy.org/). Khan Academy is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and allows students to work through a variety of math skills at their own pace. There are so many classrooms that follow the same curriculum year after year, without much adjustment for the gifted students who have already mastered these concepts. Khan Academy is a site that has over 3,000 educational video tutorials available. These videos are organized by topic and allow students to view them and complete practice activities at their own pace. Then teachers are able to track their students’ progress with those activities. When a student masters a certain skill, he/she moves on while a student who has difficulty can work on a certain skill longer. This program really allows educators to individualize their classrooms. There are so many other tools that teachers have at their fingertips. Educators need to make it a priority to utilize the technology that our students spend their day with. It will prepare them for their future and keep them engaged as well.

Technology is not going away. Our schools need to prepare our students for their future professions, where they will be problem solvers and innovators. In order for our students to be successful with these endeavors, they need to be able to navigate through web based material as well as question the validity of it.